

THE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF HISTORY IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

I am anxious to establish that the absence of a contribution from the United Kingdom to 'Geschichtskultur - Geschichtsdidaktik, vol 3' will not be seen as another example of British insularity or absence of creative activity in this field. I am reminded of the mythical newspaper headline in a London paper 'Fog in Channel, continent isolated'.

I hope it is helpful if I mention the work of the Historical Association which publishes invaluable bibliographies and pamphlets in the field. A list of publications can be obtained from the Historical Association, 59A Kennington Park Road, London SE 11 4 JH.

Probably the pamphlet which began the debate on how the teaching of History should be tackled creatively was 'Educational Objectives for the Study of History' by Coltham and Fines 1971 (TH 35) and more recently 'The New History, Theory into practice' by P Rogers (HA no 44) 1980.

In Information 1985 (Jg. 6 no 2) Piet Fontaine reviewed 'Learning History' by Dickinson, Lee and Rogers (Heinemann 1984) and colleagues will see that theory and practice are vigorously alive here.

The following bibliographies of textbooks are published by the Historical Association:

Books for 5 - 11 years olds (TB2/4/84)

Textbooks for 11 - 14 year olds (TB3/4/84)

CSE/ O level Early Modern British & European History Textbooks (TB6)

In all there are ten collections and 'A' level work and documents available are also given.

For colleagues working with students 'The Teaching of History - a short bibliography' by Dr. J. Fines revised in 1982 (Inf leaflet 2) is valuable. Leaflet 4 'The place of History in Interdisciplinary Study' by P Zec should be of interest.

The publications of the Historical Association are not expensive and they can ordered quite easily and I hope they will show that the theoretical

side of the subject is not neglected here. -

At last meeting of the Association at Stuttgart a lot of time was spent discussing what ought to be done in training teachers and I thought it might be of interest to colleagues to see what one department in the UK actually does with its graduates. I should explain that we run a one year course and only accept graduates who are History specialists with an Honours degree. At the end of the year we award the Certificate in Education and our students are then allowed to teach children in secondary schools. There is a further probationary year and after that time students are firmly established as teachers.

I take between 15 and 16 students every year; there are very few failures which is not surprising after all the rigorous selection procedures.

Some students decide that teaching is not for them or go abroad but the majority have found jobs in schools so far.

I would be pleased to supply further information about our course. Please write to me at 35 Berkeley Square, Bristol BS8 1 JA.

HISTORY - MAIN SUBJECT COURSE

The main objectives: to help graduate specialists to become competent teachers in secondary schools. It is essential to gain both practical experience and an understanding what is involved in working with children in schools. The interplay of theory and practice and the experience of life in a number of schools should be a useful preparation for a career in teaching. The course should act as a means of selection: students may discover that they are not suited to teaching or the decision may have to be made for them by examiners and colleagues in schools.

Recruitment for the course:

The majority of students in the History group will have 2.1 Honours degrees

from British Universities. Occasionally there will be a few students with 1sts, Ph D's or 2.2 degrees.

Students are selected for the course together with Headmasters from Bristol Comprehensive schools who are also History graduates themselves. The criteria for selection are enthusiasm for the subject, a liking and understanding of children, useful experience outside schools: a number of students selected will have come from industry, law and accountancy. We also look for a realistic appreciation of what is involved in becoming a teacher. My question to the Headmasters is always 'would you give this candidate a post in your school?' As the result of stringent selection the majority of our students, if they decide to teach, have not found too much difficulty in finding posts.

The Course:

There are three basic components:

the theory underlying History teaching, teaching children in small and large groups, the ability to cope with contemporary demands made on teachers in schools.

Throughout the year the emphasis is on using experience to gain and understanding of theory and to have an understanding of the main developments in the teaching of the subject.

As soon as possible students come into contact with children in schools; in the first term this will be on one day a week, there will be a fortnight in schools when some attention will of course be paid to the organisation of History departments. In second term the main teaching practice which is of the greatest importance and I welcome the extended period in schools. In the Summer term there will again be visits to schools either to teach or to do work which could not be completed during the practice term. It can happen that there has been inadequate 6th form work or students may have only seen one type of school and need further knowledge and practical experience: thus someone who spent the term in an independent school may be asked to work in a comprehensive in a deprived housing estate district.

Help from practising teachers:

We have Associate Tutors as well as those who have been Associate Tutors in the past, large numbers of former students who are familiar with my requirements and are known to be helpful with teacher education. There is large and complex network of teachers who are understanding and sympathetic to our work. It is important that students are received with understanding of their needs and anxieties; the teaching practice must be a learning experience and 'trial by ordeal' must be avoided.

I involve teachers in the theoretical sessions where I can; my intention is to try to remain firmly on the ground and practising teachers are invaluable during our afternoon sessions. In several schools Associate Tutors provide special induction programmes for the students who come to them for practice.

Theory

Students are strongly urged to read and discuss at least three books during the first weeks of the course. Typically they would be lent 'Learning and History' by Dickinson, Lee & Rogers 'History Teaching' Dickinson & Lee. Heinemann; Healy. 'Ideas for teaching History' Batsford and 'The Learning of History! Watts. RKP. and I have reasonably stocked collection of books on History teaching available to all students in the group.

Written work for assessment: first an essay to justify the subject. Students have to learn that they can not take the survival of their subject for granted and they must be prepared to fight for a place in a crowded curriculum. Also this is a good time to see if the literature concerned with History teaching has been studied. It is important that History is seen as a subject for teaching and not only a specialist preoccupation.

The second piece of written work consists of the journal and reflections on the main teaching practice. Part of professional competence is the ability to take a detached look at one's own work and what actually happens when immersed in schools and teaching. Supervision and observation of the student in the classroom give only a partial impression of what actually

happens and the discipline of keeping the journal adds a further dimension to the experience.

Assessment: while we have only the categories of either 'pass' weak pass or 'fail' each piece of written work will be discussed with students. Lesson materials and textbook evaluations are also produced during the year.

The Teaching Practice is assessed together with the school. There has not been an instance in recent years where school and supervisor totally disagreed in their opinion of the student and we are at pains to make sure that in the event of a conflict of opinion another one is sought.

Practical skills

Students are strongly urged to acquire the skills necessary to use projectors, tape recorders, over-head projectors and video tape recorders. There are now an increasing number of graduates who have the ability to work with computers.

Use of the blackboard, reprographic machinery are essential and during the teaching practice it is possible to discover weaknesses. The prejudice of many arts graduates against 'gadgetry' must be overcome but again a realistic view must be presented of the limitations as well as advantages of modern technology.

The Programme

The group meets once a week for an afternoon session and the aspects of the theoretical side of the course are best presented by giving details of the programme. Practising teachers give as many talks or lead discussions as possible.

Approaches to teaching History: I am at pains to show students that dictating notes is not the only way of teaching History. Good practice in teaching is outlined: group work, projects, evaluation of documentary evidence, Schools Council History, the New History, the use of visual aids

would be included in this session. The main aim is to give students an early introduction to what they are most likely to meet in schools.

Humanities: Many Historians are expected to help with the teaching of the Humanities. They meet an experienced teacher who helped with the creation of a new syllabus at her school. The limitations and problems associated with Humanities are not neglected.

History teaching and Drama: a former drama teacher takes this session; role playing and improvisation are more important than straight acting. Greater ease and confidence allow students to escape from conventional approaches and they are encouraged to tell stories and help the younger children to act out situations.

Being a teacher in the classroom: it must be made clear that the management of classes is a skill which must be acquired quickly: learning names, control, record keeping and general professionalism will be illustrated and discussed. Teachers have to take on many roles and must not see themselves only as History specialists. This aspect of teaching can not be dealt with in one session but permeates the course right through the year.

Aids to teaching: the use of slides, posters, film strips, reproductions of documents posters, photographs must be explained and practised. Quite an extensive library of slides and other materials is available. Students with a particular interest in Art History are encouraged to use this expertise in the classroom.

The History lesson: While lessons do not exist in isolation, students are anxious to have some guidance how to use time, how to space out the lesson material, how to avoid talking too much and how to gauge the ability levels of the children.

There will be a separate session on mixed ability teaching, styles of teaching and learning. This sort of work will go on all the time because it is part of the teaching practice and all the work of the PGCE Division.

Talk in the classroom: talk can be facilitated and it is important that no student leaves with the conviction that a good teacher is one who can maintain absolute silence. Part of this work will be how to question effectively and how to evaluate work.

Head of Department: the majority of students will normally have senior positions in due course. In the meantime they must have some understanding of the managerial requirements of teaching, the nature and organisation of schools and styles of organising a History department.

Historical Fiction: academic education may have made the students cautious about the use of fiction. Few have a good idea of the quality of writing now available (Sutcliffe or Walsh) and the possibility of presenting History as a story to younger children must be pointed out. Margaret Spencer, University of London, talks to joint groups of English and History students.

Sixth Form teaching: Again various approaches will be explored; anything to avoid the old routine of note dictation. An understanding of examination work is important and the increasingly sophisticated approach to document and source work must be considered. Usually areas in which students are specialists will be taught and where possible general studies or world affairs will be included.

There will be sessions on 'how to apply for jobs', 'the work of the Adviser' visits to the local Resources for Learning Development Unit and the Museum. In 36 weeks it is unlikely that we will have produced the complete Renaissance Teacher but I hope for a good deal of competence after the main teaching practice, the ability to understand the technical terms used in History and teaching in general, an awareness of the understanding and capacity of children and the ability to survive the first year of teaching.

In my course I must stress how much I value flexibility, informal contact and being able to respond to the needs the students express. Without the close contact with practising teachers the course would lose much of its integrity and value.

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Charles Hannam
Bristol